

Urges Legislators to Protect Fundamental Right to Equal Protection Under the Law
October 9, 2009

WASHINGTON- Today, Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) sent a letter to House Appropriations Committee leadership urging them to include in the final FY10 Defense Appropriations bill an amendment that would ban federal contracts to companies that restrict their employees' access to courts of law. The Franken Amendment (S.AMDT 2588), which passed the Senate on a bi-partisan vote of 68-30, bars funds for contractors who use mandatory arbitration clauses in their employment contracts, clauses that can deny assault victims their day in court.

The amendment was prompted by a recent case in which a 19-year-old woman who said she was raped while working for a defense contractor in Iraq learned that a clause in her contract barred her from taking her case to court. Instead, her contract forced her into an arbitration process run by her company.

In his letter, Rep. Melancon wrote, **"It is our responsibility to make sure this horrific story can never happen again. No American citizen should have to sign away his or her right to due process of law. And not a dime of taxpayer money should go to a company that would rather sweep an assault under the rug than allow our justice system to work."**

Rep. Melancon continued, **"[This amendment] will especially protect the rights of American women working in countries that often do not share our steadfast belief in equality and our rule of law."**

Rep. Melancon concluded, **"There are members in both chambers who will argue that the Jones story is an isolated incident and that this is a measure to single out and punish one contractor... But, if we fail to enact this measure, we will have failed to protect the rights and values we were sworn to uphold when we took our oath of office. We will have failed to protect the fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution: equal protection under the law and due process for all citizens. We can not let that happen."**

[Click here](#) to view the letter.

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